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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a summer remedial program for third- and fifth-grade students administered by Valdosta State University in Georgia. The program utilizes a multi-age, multi-ability, thematic, and full-inclusion approach. Assessment of the program was based on data collected through interviews with 18 students and a survey of 28 parents. Both groups reported that they enjoyed the program. The high level of student involvement and students' descriptions of the program as "fun" validated the program's hands-on approach. The following recommendations are made for the education of K-7 students: (1) use a hands-on approach to increase student involvement; (2) develop different avenues for parent involvement; (3) incorporate the thematic approach into the instructional process; and (4) consider alternative classroom designs in meeting students' needs. Copies of the interview guide and survey are included. (LMI)

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A Multi-Age, Multi-Ability, Thematically Taught, Full Inclusion Approach to Education: A Model Summer Educational Program

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ABSTRACT

The Valdosta State University is the second largest producer of public school teachers in the state of Georgia. As such, the university is constantly encouraging its students and in-service teachers within its region to employ wisdom of practice models in their classrooms. The Summer Program, begun in the summer of 1988 as a remedial program for students, has developed into a model, state of the art educational program which addresses the current research in elementary and middle school pedagogy. This study examined 10 percent of the students who enrolled in the Program during the summer of 1993 and a random sample of the parents whose children attended the program. Its purpose was to determine the perception the children had about both the methodology employed in the program as well as the methodology employed in their schools. The parent's survey was designed to elicit responses pertaining to the instructional techniques employed at both the Program and their child's school.

A Multi-Age, Multi-Ability, Thematically Taught, Full Inclusion Approach to Education: A Model Summer Educational Program

Valdosta State University, located in Valdosta, Georgia operates a four week, three and one-half hours per day model educational program prior to the start of the public school's fall semester. Begun originally as a remediation program for third and fifth grade students who had not passed the state's mandated criteria-referenced test (CRT), this program has developed into a model emulated by many of the local school systems.

Teachers for the Program are selected through an application/interview process conducted in local elementary and middle schools throughout the University's service area. The Program is based on a model adapted from the British Primary and Middle Schools which stresses the multi-age, multi-ability grouping, full inclusion of special needs children, and thematic teaching.

The Program's faculty includes an administrator, a curriculum director who also teaches one of the groupings, a guidance counselor, and a physical education teacher. The teaching faculty is supplemented with paraprofessionals (one for each teacher) chosen from local high school students who have expressed an interest in becoming teachers, an administrative assistant who obtains various items needed for the teachers to conduct their units, a secretary, and a custodial staff.

In addition to the teaching and non-teaching staff the Program has the involvement of various interns from the Valdosta State University's School of Education. These individuals are both graduate and undergraduate education majors who are enrolled in summer quarter courses which require a field experience. Through the addition of these students, the ratio of adult to student in the Program is 7:1. This student/adult ratio has been one of the key components for the success of the Program and the positive reception of the Program by the parents in the community.

Finally, the Program provides special opportunities for parents to get to know the educational process being delivered. Parent sessions are held to answer questions that may arise about the delivery system and to encourage parents to engage in the Program's activities both on site and with their child at home.

This model has become one that school systems in the University's service area have attempted to emulate. This paper will provide a review of literature on the components emphasized through the Program as well as the description and results of a qualitative study conducted during the summer and fall, 1993. The researchers in the study interviewed a sampling of the students who attended the Program and utilized a follow-up survey for parent reactions to the Program. Conclusions and

recommendations found at the end of this paper are derived from the data gathered during the study as well as observations conducted by the principal investigator.

Operational Definitions

The following terms are defined as they are used in this paper:

Mainstreaming. This term is used to refer to the placement of disabled students into one or more regular education classes, usually based on the assumption that the student has earned the opportunity to be mainstreamed. This is determined by the student exhibiting the ability to keep up with the work assigned by the teacher in the regular education classroom (Rogers, 1993). This concept is the most closely linked to the traditional service delivery model of special education that includes pull-out resource rooms.

Inclusion. This term is used to refer to a commitment to educate each disabled child to the maximum extent appropriate in the student's neighborhood school and regular classroom (Rogers, 1993). In this concept the child is removed from the regular classroom for the minimal amount of time possible. Special education services are provided within the regular classroom. Involved in this concept is the notion that support services should be brought to the child rather than moving the child to the services. In addition the child need only benefit socially from being in the

class instead of having to keep up with the other students. This concept provides the disabled child with appropriate social models and age-appropriate peers.

Full inclusion. The belief that "instructional practices and technological supports are presently available to accommodate all students in the schools and classrooms they would otherwise attend if not disabled" (Rogers, 1993, p. 2). The special education services are generally delivered in the form of training and technical assistance to the regular education teacher.

Regular Education Initiative. This is a phrase coined by Madeline Will (1986) to discuss either the merger of the governance of special and regular education or the merger of the funding channels of each. Initially, it was not used to discuss forms of service delivery, however, the usage of this term in the literature interchangeably with inclusion and full inclusion has blurred the lines that distinguish these terms (Rogers, 1993).

THEMATIC TEACHING

Teaching through themes is a strategy that has recently been revived in American schools, although it has been the philosophical core of British primary and middle grades schools for years. At the Program, the delivery process used by the faculty is based in this model of instruction.

In the past, this approach has been called the "child-oriented curriculum," the "integrated curriculum," the "unit approach," and most recently "the project approach" (Katz & Chard, 1990; Wray, 1989). Each approach can be traced to the philosophies of past early childhood educators, including Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, and Piaget, all of whom suggested that young children need to be active participants in their learning (Strickland & Morrow, 1990).

Thematic teaching is "...a child-centered approach in which content is organized into broad topics which are studied in-depth during an extended period of time" (Gamberg, Kwak, Hutchings, & Altheim, 1988). Providing an alternative to compartmentalizing curriculum, teaching through themes allows teachers to integrate content areas rather than separate them into discrete subjects to be studied at designated times during the day. In this way math, social studies, language arts, science, art, drama, and cooking become tools to help students of all ages represent and build knowledge about a particular topic.

As a thematic topic is explored, many opportunities are provided for children to build on prior knowledge as well as on newly acquired knowledge in their lives in meaningful ways. Projects are planned, researched, and carried out collaboratively by the students who have concrete and realistic experiences as they become "experts" on a topic.

Opportunities abound for children to become engaged in experiences which promote critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, cooperation among peers, productivity, self-discipline, and self-esteem. Through demonstrations and presentations in a variety of formats, children share their unique perspective about a topic with their classmates, contributing to a common body of information and knowledge. The interactive, real-world, student ownership aspects of thematic teaching furthers a child's understanding of the world which begins at home. Through this approach, children of all ages are able to bridge the learning between home and school.

In middle grades education, James Beane (1990) has long been an advocate for the involvement of students in their learning. He has suggested that the current curriculum of the middle grades is only a modification of the junior high/departmental approach. His approach advocates that students become involved to the point of making decisions about what they will learn. This notion of student involvement is supported by Kramer (1992) who found that in classrooms with a high degree of student involvement, participation, and decision making, students exhibited greater achievement and more positive attitudes toward school in general, their subject in particular. Kramer further noted that an understanding of how middle level students think about their classroom

environment and comparing their thinking to the developmental stage characteristics of young adolescents should enable teachers to provide more meaningful learning environments. The concepts of cooperative learning and the "K, W, L" (what do you Know?, what do you Want to learn; and what did you Learn?) approach are but two methods for incorporating student participation/involvement in the education process. These ideas are based on the assumption that students need to develop a sense of ownership about the material they study. If students feel ownership in their learning, they will invest in successfully working within the curriculum.

MULTI-AGE GROUPING

Multi-age grouping, a common practice in the British primary and middle grades schools, can be defined as "...placing children who are at least a year apart in age into the same classroom groups" (Katz, Evangelou, & Hartman, 1991, p.1). The notion of multi-age groupings in American education is only now beginning to be accepted. Past experience of with multi-age groupings has generally been through those students who had been retained.

Although this form of education was common practice when the one-room schoolhouse was prevalent, multi-age grouping was abandoned as communities grew, work became specialized, transportation increased.

and schools began to evolve (Pratt, 1983). Renewed interest in multi-age grouping, awakened by the publication of The Non-Graded Elementary School (Goodlad & Anderson, 1959), spawned the nongraded school movement in the early 1960s. However, research on the movement revealed that, although children of mixed ages were in the same classrooms, instruction was more often based on ability with the classes, limiting the interaction of multi-age instructional groupings.

Recently, multi-age grouping has been recommended because of the potential advantages in both academic and social development (Katz, et al., 1991; Royal Commission on Education, 1989; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988). Although the cognitive benefits of multi-age grouping have not been fully documented by the research, studies which focused on novice and expert roles assumed by children have implications for classrooms of mixed-age students. When children are labeled as expert (i.e., more capable than other children at a task) they are grouped with those who are novices (those less capable at a task). Research (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1983, Brown & Reeve, 1985) on this topic has shown that the novices adapt their responses to align with the directions and solutions posed by the experts. In addition, the self-esteem of the expert group is raised as they now possess information that is deemed necessary and useful by the novice group.

The social advantages of multi-age grouping include the increased occurrence of leadership behavior in older group members, the development of more complex and interactive play in younger group members, and improved prosocial behavior such as sharing, taking turns, and helping in all ages (French, Waas, Stright, & Baker, 1986; Howes & Farver, 1987; Goldman, 1981). Finally, following an exhaustive review on the research of multi-age grouping, Katz, et al. (1991) recommended that children be placed in mixed-age classroom settings in which the curriculum is "...oriented towards projects and activities that encourage and allow children to work collaboratively using the structures of peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and spontaneous grouping characteristics of young children's play settings" (p. 50).

INCLUSION

Background

Historically, the trend in services for children with disabilities has been toward including disabled children into the mainstream. In the early 1800s, disabled students of all categories were denied any form of instruction in the school setting. Schooling, if there was any, was carried on in the home. Late in the 19th century, states began to provide education for the disabled, and residential programs for students who were

blind, deaf, or mentally retarded were instituted (D'Alonza and Boggs, 1990).

By the early 20th century, some local education initiatives existed in the form of special schools or classes for the disabled, such as residential facilities, within the community (D'Alonza and Boggs, 1990). These provided custodial services for the severely and profoundly disabled. They were housed in locations removed from the regular school setting (Reynolds et. al, 1984).

Court Decisions and Legislation

In the mid-1900s, increasing numbers of parent groups brought pressure to bear on local school districts to provide services for a wider definition of disabled students. (D'Alonzo & Boggs, 1990) This movement climaxed with the passage of Public Law 94-142. Three court decisions preceded the passage of this legislation. Each had a significant impact on the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all children. These decisions were: Brown v. Board of Education (1954) - rights to a FAPE; PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972) - applied Brown to disabled children; and Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972) - solidified ownership of disabled students as the province of the local regular education system with

regards to funding--special education funding was supplementary (Reynolds et. al, 1984; Hebbeler, Smith & Black, 1991).

Public Law 94-142 (1975), entitled Education of the Handicapped, provided guidelines for the identification of disabled children. In addition it provided funding formulas designed to give states and local districts funds for implementation of the special education services as described in the act. Included within P.L. 94-142 is the concept of least restrictive environment. Implied in this term is the idea that the disabled child should be "mainstreamed" to the maximum extent possible given the identified disability. The logical conclusion, then, is that students with mild disabilities would best be served in the regular classroom with a minimum of intervention. However, this has not always been the case when actual service provision has been examined (Reynolds, 1989). Service provision for special education students with mild disabilities varies from separate schools to inclusive classrooms. Initially, students were "pulled out" of the regular education class and placed in classrooms that were often housed on separate campuses away from the regular education school. While this was an improvement over pre-P.L. 94-142 services in institutions, the conclusion of parents and the findings of litigation was that this setting did not truly meet the spirit of the Act. In the next generation of services, special needs classes were moved to campuses of the

nondisabled students. However, these classes were generally housed in a separate wing of the building or in portable classrooms. The interaction between disabled and nondisabled students continued to be minimal (Lilly, 1988; Reynolds, 1989).

Increased parental pressure and continued litigation led to the concept of pull-out classes which were included within the school buildings (Lilly, 1988). Regular education and special needs students began eating lunch together and participating in other non-academic services such as physical education, music, and library with their nondisabled peers. This approach has been referred to as mainstreaming. Students identified as learning disabled and emotionally/behaviorally disordered were more often served in pull-out resource rooms while separate classes were most typical of services provided for the severely intellectually disabled. Although the notion of a separate school for students with special needs is less common today, nonetheless, all of the above settings still exist.

The degree of inclusion each system employs is determined by the philosophical bent of the administration of the system, the building administrator, and the special education director. The overall momentum of special education services, however, has been toward less separate placement and increased inclusion of special needs students in the regular education mainstream (Lilly, 1988; Reynolds, 1989).

Within the last decade the debate about the inclusion of special needs students has become heated. Parental pressure has increased for the inclusion of disabled students into regular education classes. Resistance against inclusion has mounted on the part of regular classroom educators, many of whom feel inadequately trained to handle the wide diversity of abilities within the confines of their regular classrooms created by the inclusion of disabled students (Kaufman and Hallahan, 1990).

D'Alonzo and Boggs (1990) indicated that regular educators were not as ready and accepting of this concept as proponents would believe. Kauffman, Gerber, and Semmel (1988) concurred and stated that "Teachers who are more competent do not necessarily have more positive attitudes toward handicapped or difficult-to-teach students being placed in their classrooms" (p. 6). They concluded that the greater diversity within a class, the less likely it will be that even a competent teacher will be able to effectively teach all the children most of the time. For this reason they opposed the concept of REI as one that espouses total inclusion of all students regardless of degree of disability.

Two recent studies addressing inclusion of both severely and mildly disabled students have suggested a variety of methodological and administrative changes needed for successful inclusion. York, Vandercook, Macdonald, Heise-Neff, and Caughey (1992) found increased social

competencies and acceptance of severely disabled middle school students in regular education classes. They concluded that inservice training and continued support (from university staff) for regular educators contributed significantly to program success, that administrative support was critical, and that selection of those teachers most receptive to inclusion was more likely to result in success.

Baker and Zigmond (1990) studied the inclusion of learning disabled students in regular education reading classes. They suggested that the amount of time devoted to teaching be increased, that a wider range of techniques be used to teach reading (including variance in group sizes), and that more interactive tasks be included because of increased student involvement in the learning process. As in York et. al. (1992), inservice training and ongoing technical assistance in effective instruction were recommended. These changes were supported by Gersten and Woodward (1990) as necessary for the creation of meaningful sustained change in classroom practice that seemed to be required by the REI.

The above studies and the general paucity of research and/or comment on the REI by regular educators, would lead to the conclusion that the preparedness of regular educators and their readiness/acceptance level would need to be addressed before any wholesale inclusion is attempted within a specific school or district (Jenkins, Pious, & Jewell,

1990; Davis, 1989). Current research, while sparse, does support the need for training, continued technical support, and curricular and methodological changes, and focuses on a cooperative endeavor between the special educator and regular educator-working toward common goals for all children.

LEARNING STYLE

The notion that curricular and methodological changes need to be made was espoused by Baker and Zigmond (1990) as a result of a study of REI implementation, using learning disabled students, in a K-5 school. Specifically, instituting interactive learning to promote more student involvement in the learning process was recommended. However, these are not new methods, but rather methods recommended by many twentieth century educational theorists that have been revisited and restated in operative terms.

In the early part of this century, John Dewey espoused the concept of learning by doing. He believed that through this purposeful action, which the child determines, children learned best. To Dewey, school was not a preparation for life, but, for the child, was life. He was an advocate of an interactive style in which the child was an active problem solver, planner, and cooperative learner. The teacher provided a highly structured environment in which the children carried out the activities they themselves

planned. At about the same time, Montessori emphasized educating the whole child, individualizing education, basing education on the child's current level of functioning, and creating a harmonious relationship between teacher and child. Although the popularity of her method varies, the basic tenets support the use of individualized education plans for students and basing education on the child's current level of functioning (Markoff, 1992; Crain, 1992).

Piaget, in his theory of cognitive development, He emphasized interaction with the environment and hand-on learning. As children internalized their experiences, they built internal schemas or cognitive structures through a continuous process of assimilation and accommodation. Thus, as a child's information/experiential base increased, learning became more efficient. The child's assimilation and accommodation were facilitated by the presence of schema with which to relate new experiences (Markoff, 1992; Crain, 1991; Miller, 1993).

During the 1950s and 1960s, psychologists who were disenchanted with current theory, began studying how information was processed. This line of investigation was applied to studies of children's learning processes. Central to information processing theory is the notion that information is processed in stages or steps. These steps include attending to the stimulus, recognizing it, transforming it into some type of mental representation,

comparing it to information already stored in memory, assigning meaning to it, and acting on it in some fashion (Miller, 1993).

There are limits, however, to how much information can be processed at each stage. These steps within the human information processing system are interactive, interfacing the learner with the environment. Like Piaget, information processing theorists believe that internal schemata provide the foundation for future learning; the greater the variety of schemata, the more easily information is recognized, codified, and assigned meaning. These schemata also facilitate storage and organization of information in long-term memory (Biehler & Snowman, 1990; Slavin, 1991). Inferred from this is that information that is meaningful, or perceived by the learner as meaningful, is more easily encoded, recognized, assigned meaning, and learned or stored in long-term memory as a part of a schemata. Implied is that learning should be an interactive process involving tasks that are meaningful or perceived as meaningful by the learner (Slavin, 1991). Therefore, it is not surprising that research (Baker & Zigmond, 1990) should find that interactive learning processes work best with an inclusion (i.e., REI) model. The literature on learning and cognitive processing, addressing both disabled and non-disabled children, has espoused this methodology for most of the twentieth century. While various theories have enjoyed varying popularity,

current emphasis on thematic units appears to be drawing on the best of these theories and applying them to actual classroom practice.

THE STUDY

Methods and Procedures

Subjects

Student subjects for this investigation were selected from the total number of students who participated in the Program. Parent permission for student participation in the study was obtained when the parents signed a waiver found on the back of the application form. Each student in the program was assigned a number based on the alphabetical order of his/her last name. A random number table was used to select the 20 students to be interviewed. Of the 20, only 18 were interviewed due to the absences of the other two.

Parent subjects for the Parent Survey were chosen using the same list of students as described above. It was possible for a parent to be selected more than once, however, the parent was to describe the experience only of the child whose name appeared on the form.

Instrumentation

The student interview instrument was designed collaboratively by the principal investigator, an administrative assistant who participated in the program, and the team leader for the middle grades group. The

instrument contained two distinct parts. The first part was designed to elicit information from the students concerning the school they had attended during the previous academic year. The second part sought information about the Summer Program. Each of the investigators submitted questions and refinements were made to the overall interview instrument.

After the interview instrument was developed and the subjects selected, the principal investigator worked with the administrative assistant and the middle grades team leader to assist in the interview process. The principal investigator coached the other individuals to develop techniques and methods to employ during the interviews. Special attention was given to methodology on probing for further information and the avoidance of affirmation or confirmation to student responses.

The parent survey was developed by the principal investigator and a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at Valdosta State University. This instrument was mailed to the parents whose children had been selected through the use of a random table of numbers. In some instances, parents received more than one copy of the survey if they had more than one child attend and their names were chosen as described above. A total of 66 student names was selected. A

copy of each of the instruments, the interview questions, and the parent survey are found in Appendix (A).

Findings

Student Interviews - Home School Information

The ages of the students selected to participate in the interviews ranged in age from seven to twelve with a median age of 9 years. The grades which they had completed the previous spring ranged from kindergarten through grade 5.

The first series of questions was designed to have the students give their perceptions of the school they had attended the previous academic year. Of the 18 students interviewed 14 indicated that they liked school, 2 said they did not like school, and 2 said they "kind of" liked school. When the interviewers probed for further information besides a "yes," "no," or "kind of," those who answered "yes" responded: "It's fun--science projects and stuff," "I want to get a good education so I can get a job," "It's fun--playground, reading, math," "It's fun to learn," "We take alot of field trips." "I like to learn new things," "We do fun things--paint recess, read, and math," "I had a good teacher who taught interesting stuff," "school is education and it's good for you," and "It's fun--hand puppets, drawing, coloring."

Those students who answered in the negative provided the following reasons for their responses: "I don't like my teacher--we had too much work," and "it's boring sometimes." Those who "kind of" liked school provided the following reasons for their answer: "Yes, if we had a 'fun day'--PE. No, if lots of work and I just don't want to go;" "Most stuff is really boring--math isn't, reading isn't, but science is boring. Everything else is fun."

When the students were asked to describe the grades they had received the previous year, 15 reported that they had received A's through C's. Two of the students indicated they had received either an "E," "S," or "G" with one student indicating that he/she did not receive any grades at all. The "E," "S," or "G" and "no grades were given last year" which were reported reflected a move toward portfolio assessment by one of the elementary schools in the area.

The interviewers next asked the students how many children had been in their classes last year. Responses ranged from a low of 1-15 students in classes for two of the respondents to a high of 31-35 for one of the respondents. Fourteen respondents indicated that their class sizes ranged from 21-29.

Students were asked if their classmates were all in the same grade. This was an attempt to determine if any of the students in the Program

had participated in a multi-age, multi-ability grouped classroom prior to attending the Summer Program. Of the students interviewed, none of them experienced the format which was used at the Program; however, several mentioned that they had classmates who had been retained the preceding year.

The final part of this question was used to determine if the students had the same teacher for the major subjects or if they changed teachers during the school day. Eleven of the students indicated that they had the same teacher for all subjects (self-contained environment) while seven said that they had more than one teacher for the major subjects.

In question 4 the students were asked if they liked the teacher they had during the previous academic year. All of the students interviewed indicated that they liked their teacher. The following statements are examples of student responses when asked what it was that made them like their teacher(s): "nice--gave us candy at times;" "treats everyone the same;" "nice--extra free time;" "lots of art projects;" "plays, science projects--lots of activities;" and "took time to help kids before going on to something else." When these responses were compiled into categories, with students being permitted to give multiple responses, the most frequent response (10) indicated that their teacher had provided the students with activities, the

second highest response (7) involved treats or rewards. The third highest response (4) was categorized as the teacher provided a fun environment.

Question five was designed to have the students describe their favorite teacher. This brought a wide range of answers, however, the idea of the teacher being "nice" was the most frequent response (12). Researcher categories for the other responses included the teacher's use of hands-on activities (7) and the teacher providing the students with fun activities (this may also be viewed as student involved activities). The notion of the teacher being fair in grading/dealing with students, concerned about his/her students, and a caring individual was mentioned on five occasions. When the students were asked to describe their least favorite teacher comments such as "no fun and boring," "mean--mad all the time," "punishes alot, extra work when you're bad," and "mean, hollered alot, and went too fast through the directions" were commonly heard. In fact, the frequent response was that their least favorite teacher was "mean/mad" (5 responses).

The next series of questions sought information about the students' favorite subject (multiple responses were permitted). The subject most mentioned was mathematics (10 responses). This was followed by science (3), social studies (2), spelling (2), and reading, art, and Spanish with one response each. The students were then asked why they considered these

subjects their favorites. The most frequent response offered associated the subject with activities performed to assist in learning the subject. Comments such as "I like math games," "it's fun," and "fun activities, do math in small groups" were frequently made. The interviewer then asked the students how the teacher taught the favorite subject. The most frequent response involved hands-on activities (8 responses) followed by small group activities (4). In addition the students related various methods the teachers used to involve, reward, and assist the students in learning the subject. The final question in this series asked the students if their teachers had used themes to present any of the material they had studied. These responses were evenly divided (9 had, 9 had not).

Question 8 presented a series of questions which examined the student's least favorite subject and how it was taught. Once again, with multiple responses for each section of the question, the least favorite subject was mathematics (6 responses). This was followed by science and social studies (3), English (2), and all other subjects being mentioned once. When the students were asked why the subject they mentioned was their least favorite, responses such as "bored," "too much work," "questions are too hard," "I stutter when I read," and "too difficult" were made. Placing the responses into researcher-designed categories presents a profile that indicates the subject being too hard was mentioned six times, too much

work four times, and subject was boring three times. The students were then asked to describe how their least favorite subject was taught. Responses to this were primarily centered on their math instruction and subjects which pertained to reading. The most frequently given response (5) had to do with a constant use of worksheets. This was followed by responses that were categorized by the researchers as pertaining to lectures and board work (3 each), and traditional reading groups and traditional math board work (2 each). Too much homework was cited only once.

When the students were asked what they liked most about school last year (subjects, activities, etc. with multiple responses possible), the most frequent response was recess or physical education (7). This was followed by field day (2) and a variety of responses which were cited only once. The probe to this question sought to determine what it was that made the students like their response. Their answers reflected that the activity was held outside, it was fun, and it had a game orientation.

A follow-up to the above line of questioning asked what the students liked least about their school last year (subjects, activities, etc. with multiple responses possible). The most frequent response was related to not being able to go outside (3). This was followed by physical education class, math class, and "nothing" which were each cited twice. The students were then asked why the subject or activity they mentioned

was their least favorite, the most frequent response was "it's boring" (5). When the interviewers asked the students to explain the term "boring" the students mentioned classes where they had to "take notes and listen." All other responses were mentioned only once.

Questions 11 and 12 were designed to look at family involvement with the child's education. The interviewers first asked the students if they had told their family about things they had learned during the previous year. This received an overwhelming "yes" (16). When the interviewer probed as to how the family information was given to the parents, the students indicated that their parents asked them what was taking place at school (13). Comments in this section reflected parental interest in the school and the child. Examples of this include "they called the school," "mom asked me about my grades," "they really wanted to know," and "it was exciting to me and I thought they should know about it." The second question in this series asked the students if they perceived that their parents were interested in the school. Once again an overwhelming 17 responded in the affirmative. When the interviewer asked how the student knew if the parents were interested, the students said that their parents would "ask how school was going," "parents want me to get a good education," and "I get punished if I get low grades."

The next two questions were open-ended and designed to obtain any information that the students had not previously provided. The first of these questions asked the students what was the best thing that happened to them in school the previous year. These responses were as varied as the number of students interviewed. They included "I got a chance to teach the class," "we got a new teacher," "field day," and "our pizza parties." The second question (number 14) asked the students what was the worst thing that happened to them in school last year. These responses were equally varied. They included "when I missed 'space day' because my dad's grandma died," "when I got in a fight and got cut by a knife," "when I got sent to the Principal for yelling on the bus," "the school's lunches," and "when I tripped over a rock and everybody laughed at me."

The final question in this part of the interview asked the students to tell the interviewer the most important thing they learned during the last school year. Many of these responses were related to the D.A.R.E. program and the message of drug abuse. A few of the responses pertained to doing well in school for preparation for later in life as well as proper behavior for school.

Student Interviews - Summer Program Responses

Question 1 on this part of the interview determined that 56% (10) of the sample were in the grade 2/3 cluster; 16.7% (3) in the K/1 cluster.

and 27.7% (5) in the 4-7 cluster. When the interviewers asked the students in the sample why they were attending the Summer Program, the most frequent answer (6) was that their parents wanted them to attend. This was followed closely (4 responses) by those who indicated they wanted to learn.

The third question asked of the students was, "Do you like to come to the Summer Program?" Seventeen of the eighteen students in the survey stated that they liked to come to the Program while only one indicated that "sometimes [he/she] liked to come to the Program." When the interviewer asked the students why they liked the Program, the most frequent response was because of fun activities/fun things to do. Among other responses were that friends were also in attendance, that "it's better than real school," and "not as much paper and pencil work--we work with our mind here."

The most frequently mentioned (44.4%; 8 responses) class size at the Program was in the range 16-20. Of all those interviewed 77.8% (14) indicated that their class size at the Program was 20 or less. This is keeping with the overall design of the Program which places a cap of 20 students per teacher on each class. In question 5 the students were asked if they liked their teacher at the Summer Program. All 18 of the students indicated that they liked their teacher for the Program. When the

interviewer probed as to the reasons (multiple responses acceptable) the following were the most frequent responses (researcher interpretation of data): "She/he is nice;" "What we do is fun;" and the notion of hands-on activities, i.e. making things, doing things, and overall student involvement. When the students were asked to describe their teacher at the Program (multiple responses acceptable), the most frequent response (11) was "She/he is nice." Other responses included: "She/he is fun," or a reference was made to the teacher being a caring person who makes the child feel happy and/or special.

Question 6 on the interview was to determine what the students enjoyed most about the Program (multiple responses acceptable). Overwhelmingly, the students indicated that some form of active involvement was what the Program enjoyable. The answers ranged from cooking activities to learning Spanish, to the physical education segment of the program. When the interviewers asked the student why they enjoyed the items they mentioned, the most common response was that the learning was new and fun. The responses to this probe all indicated that the environment and the activities were non-threatening, involved working with other students, and activity-oriented.

The next question the interviewers asked was what the students "liked least about the Summer Program." The most frequent response (6)

indicated that there was "nothing [I] like least. [I] like all of it." The second most frequent response was that the program was "too short" (four weeks, 3 1/2 hours per day).

Students were next asked about the themes they were studying in the Summer Program and the way in which their teachers were presenting the themes. The students provided multiple responses to this question. However, all of the answers were centered around student involvement. These included making things, group work, movies, demonstrations, and books rather than textbooks.

In question 9 the researchers asked the students to compare their work in the Summer Program with their "real school." The responses included many of the activities included in the Summer Program with the most frequently occurring responses (4) being art/drawing and "nothing is the same." This was followed by "playing outside," and "math work" (3 each).

The interviewers then asked the students what was different between the Summer Program and their "real school" (multiple responses acceptable). The most frequently given response (7) related to the various activities in the Summer Program. This was followed closely by "we don't stay the whole day" and "we get to eat snacks at the Summer Program" (4 each). The remainder of the responses all indicated that the Summer

Program was a more open environment with a faculty that permitted students to interact with each other and with the faculty. In addition the students mentioned that there were no textbooks, grades, or homework in the Summer Program.

Questions 11 and 12 were designed to determine parental interest in the Program. Sixteen of the 18 students who were interviewed indicated that they told their family what they were doing in the Program. Two of the students said that they "sometimes" told their family about their activities. When asked if their families seemed interested in the Program. 15 indicated that their families were interested, 1 said his/her family was not interested, 1 didn't know if interest existed, and 1 answered "most of the time." The interviewers probed as to how the students knew if their families were interested. To this the most frequent answer (6) was that the parents asked them what they were doing at the Program. Other answers included that "I tell them," "they listen when I talk about the Program," and the students observed their parents reactions to talk about the Program.

The next two questions were open-ended and sought to determine what were the best and worst things that had taken place for the student at the Program. Each of these areas received a variety of responses. Examples of the best things that took place included "fun subjects," "making shirts," "making new friends," "when we get to play," "everything."

and "no homework or grades." Under the caption of the worst things which took place, the following are a representative sample of responses: "being a few minutes late going home," "being outside in the sun," "I'm almost always the smallest," "movies I didn't like," and "turtles that didn't move."

Question 15 was designed to have the students describe the most important thing they learned in the Program. With some of the students providing multiple answers, each of the students interviewed mentioned the theme their class studied. In addition some interesting comments were also received such as "how to work with others" (2 responses), "I can have fun--school isn't always boring," and "new ways to learn."

Of the eighteen students who were interviewed, 14 said that they would like to return to the Program in 1994, 3 said that they might be interested, and 1 said he/she was not interested in returning. When the interviewer asked the students why or why not they would like to return, 10 of the respondents indicated that the Program was "fun." Comments from the students included "we do projects," "I like the movies and plays," "this is better than regular school," and "I like school and summer is too long."

The final question in this section was designed to provide student input into the planning for the 1994 Program. The interviewers asked the students what they would like to see done differently in next year's

Program. With multiple responses, the list provided was as varied as the students who were interviewed. The most frequently given response (3) was "I don't know."

Parent Survey Results

In order to assess parent perceptions of the Summer Program, a random sampling of 66 parents was chosen. They were sent a questionnaire (see Appendix A) and asked to assess their attitudes before the Program began and after the Program was completed. A total of 28 questionnaires were returned (46.67 percent). The parents who returned the survey had a total of 41 students involved in the program. Of these, 14 were in the kindergarten/first grade class, 9 in the second/third grade class, and 16 in the fourth-seventh grade class (no information was included on 2 students). Ninety-four percent of the students attended all four weeks of the program (Questions 1-3).

Parents with more than one child attending were asked to respond to the name of the child on their survey form. The age range of the children whose parents returned the survey is shown in the table below (Question 4).

Table 1. Age of Students in Parent Survey

AGE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
5	2
6	6
7	7
8	3
9	6
10	5
11	7
12	3

The parents were also asked to grade their children's experience in the program, using a range of A(high) to E(low). Twenty-seven parents (71 percent) rated the program an A; 8 parents (21 percent) rated the program a B; and, 2 parents (5 percent) rated the program as C. None were recorded below the "C" level; one respondent did not rate the program (Question 4).

The parents indicated that, of the 28 children in the respondent group, 85.7 percent (24) looked forward to going to the Summer Program (Question 5). Likewise, 82.1 percent (23)of the students have always have

enjoyed school (Question 6) and 92.9 percent (26) looked forward to beginning school this fall (Question 7).

When the parents were asked to provide a summary of their child's grades from the previous academic year, 60.7 percent of the students (17) had A's and B's last year, 25 percent (7) had B's and C's, and 10.7 percent (3) had C's or lower; one student attended a kindergarten where grades were not assigned (Question 8). Following the first report period of the 1993-94 academic year, when compared with last year's grades, 28.6 percent of the students (8) had higher overall grades this year, 7.1 percent (2) had lower grades overall, and 64.3 percent (18) showed no change in grades (Question 9).

Perceptions of their students' ability to handle school work last year showed that 60.7 percent (17) were able to handle most of the work, 32.1 percent (9) experiencing some difficulty, and 7.1 percent (2) unable to keep up with the work (Question 10). Thus far this school year, 78.6 percent (22) were able handle most of the work, 21.4 percent (6) were experiencing some academic difficulty, and no one was unable to keep up with the school work (Question 11). The majority of the parents (67.9 percent, 19) felt that their child benefitted from the Summer Program with and additional 28.6 percent (8) perceiving the Program benefitted their child to some extent (96.5% perceived benefit of Program to some degree).

Only 3.6 percent (1 parent) saw no benefit to their child (Question 12). As a result, 75 percent (21) of the parents who responded to the survey indicated that they would send their child to next year's Summer Program. The remaining parents (7) were not sure. No parent indicated that they would not sent their child next summer (Question 13).

When asked about their perceptions of the Summer Program, 92.6 percent (26 parents) stated that they were pleased with their child's/children's experiences; only 7.1 percent (2 parents) were undecided. No parent indicated displeasure with the program (Question 14).

Eighty-two percent (23) of the students attended public school (Question 15). Interestingly, the same proportion of parents indicated that the way their child was taught in the Summer Program differed the experience in regular school. The Summer Program differed from a traditional school program a variety of ways. Parents indicated that learning was fun and was more hands-on. Their comments included the following: "More one-to-one attention," "The Summer Program involved the children in the subject more completely. Learning was fun and I believe what was learned will stick with my daughter," "He learned things by enjoying what he was doing. School work he is taught now is structured by the 'books.' They do not teach Thematic, All papers are marked in Red Ink. This is different from the Summer Program," "More hands on;

combined grades," "All courses were mixed into one learning experience and [my child] was not bored with the school." "He was very excited about the topic and looked forward to attending every morning." "The Summer Program teachers made learning fun. I even wanted to attend and I'm 37!" "Regular program is textbook bound." "... they related fun and exciting activities to learning and it made her realize that to learn could be fun and not something she hated," "More active involvement and active learning rather than reading texts." "The Summer Program cared about the kids more and made it a lot more fun."

Of the parents surveyed, 89.3 percent (25) would support a similar program for regular school if it were provided as an alternative with no tuition; 10.7 percent (3) of the parents were undecided with regard to an alternative program. The parents perceived the Summer Program as being different from their child's regular school. The majority of children showed no change in grades; however, 28.6 percent showed improvement in grades.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This section will be divided into two parts. The first part will examine the responses given on the student surveys and the second area will look at the responses from the parent surveys.

Student Responses

The group of students who were randomly selected for the interview not only enjoyed school but also did quite well in academic subjects. With success such as this, it may be suggested that the obtained responses are skewed toward "school-type" activities. However, the information these students offered provides insight into the learning process of these children.

None of the children who were interviewed indicated that they had ever participated in a multi-age, multi-ability educational setting in their home school. Furthermore, most of the students were in a self-contained classroom (11/18). This information confirms the demographic grade level data which indicated that 72.3% (13 students) were in the traditionally elementary grades (grades k though 3) with 27.7% (5) in some form of middle school/junior high school setting (grades 4-7).

When the children were asked what it was they enjoyed about school or the Program, their replies centered around the term "fun" and an indication of student involvement in the learning process. The same tenor of response was also mentioned when the students were asked to describe their favorite teacher(s). However, when the students were asked to describe their least favorite teacher, the answers reflected an individual whose classroom environment did not permit or adjust for student

involvement or one which was based on punishment-oriented homework assignments.

Several of the interview questions were designed to obtain information about the students' favorite and least favorite subject. The most frequently mentioned favorite subject was math (10 responses), however, the students' least favorite subject was also math (6 responses). When the interviewers probed as to the methods used to teach their favorite subject, the students indicated that both hands-on activities and small group work were utilized. The reasons subjects were mentioned as being "least favorite" were, according to the students, "boring," "questions too hard," and "too much work." It is interesting that the same subject is mentioned for both responses. A possible answer to this puzzle may be that teachers employed math manipulatives in the initial phase of the learning but then switched to a more traditional approach. It is this change to the traditional approach that may be cause for the students' statements that the topic was boring and that there was too much homework.

Other subjects mentioned as least favorite included those which involved reading, i.e. social studies and science. In addition to students having difficulty with reading, the use of worksheets was frequently

mentioned as a method used by teachers but which the students found uninteresting.

The students were asked to compare the Program to the school they had attended the previous year, both from the aspect of the work required and overall differences. Their responses centered on the notion of the Program being activity-centered and taught with a hands-on approach.

When the interviewers asked the students what the best things were that they had at the Program and what it was that they liked most about their school the previous year, one theme kept reappearing--FUN. This answer seemed to have a natural connection with the way in which their favorite subject was taught, the manner in which their least favorite subject was taught, and the descriptors the students used to describe their favorite teacher. The key being that those factors which the students enjoyed and whom the students indicated were their favorites were those who made learning "fun" and who provided the students with an opportunity to become involved in the learning process.

The final questions in the students' interviews were concerned with the parental involvement in the student's education. Of the group interviewed, the indication was that their parents were interested not only in what they did in school, but also with what transpired in the Program. It can be speculated that the parents' interest becomes a positive influence

in the student's life when this is examined with the students' feelings about school and the grades they receive.

Parent Responses

Comparing these results with those reported by Baker and Zigmond (1990), the use of interactive learning processes, such as thematic units, in inclusive classrooms is supported. Also, judging from parent response, a similar learning environment would be supported within a regular school program. Increases were reported in student grades and student ability to understand school work.

The parents who responded to the survey had high marks for the Program, indicating that they would send their child the following year (75% - 21 respondents), while none indicated that they would not send their child. In addition, the respondents gave the Program high marks for the experiences their child received.

Many of the parents commended the Program for its approach to education and children in general. They realized the differences between the format used in their child's school and the Program and, for the most part, were favorably impressed with the format at the Program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The interview process and the survey of parents indicated that both groups enjoyed the Program. A majority of the parents were interested in seeing the educational approach of the Program implemented in their local schools. It can be said that our sample was biased in that all of the children who were interviewed enjoyed school. However, some interesting conclusions can be reached from the interviews.

Of those children who were interviewed, it was apparent that they enjoyed being involved in the educational process. The most interesting part of this notion of involvement is the concept of "fun" as children relate it to education. Those who were interviewed continued to refer to school activities and subjects as being fun and the activities in which they were engaged at the Program as also being "fun." When the investigators probed the students as to what they meant by using the word "fun," the students overwhelmingly indicated that when they were involved in the learning process school was no longer drudgery. This theme of student involvement can be seen in the students' descriptions of their favorite teachers and favorite subjects. They told the investigators that they enjoyed learning when they were involved. Piaget described children between ages 5 and 13 as concrete learners. A characteristic of this age is that children acquire new knowledge by touching, holding, and interacting with their learning. The methods used at the Program and

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those used by the favorite teachers and in the favorite subjects of the children indicated that the hands-on approach was the way in which they learned best. An additional means of verification of the hands-on approach was mentioned in the D.A.R.E. drug education program. Although the program is held for only a few weeks during the academic year, it is features a high degree of student involvement and various forms of information presentation. In addition, the students referred to going outside as something that they enjoyed doing. It was this aspect that made physical education classes enjoyable. Many times adults hear children speak about having fun in school and assume that no learning is taking place. Adults often consider fun as non-structured time during which students are free to do whatever they please. However, it is when the children are having "fun" as they define it that they are learning the most because they are actively involved.

The thematic approach that is the mainstay of the Program was viewed by parents and students as interesting. This approach had the students involved in the learning as well as linking the learning to the real world of the students. Subject areas were intertwined as the students worked through the various themes.

One of the chief components of the thematic approach is the use of trade books for obtaining information rather than a textbook. This

approach sometimes makes for a difficult adjustment, especially for parents who have been taught that the textbook is all important. However, when the students realized that there were no textbooks and that the teachers were not going to be answer-givers, they adapted to the methods of information retrieval found in the classroom library as well as the Program's library.

Recommendations

Recommendations from this study of the Valdosta State University's Summer Program that are applicable to the education of students grades K-7 are as follow:

1. Students need to be involved in their learning. Find ways to present the material that include every child. The more hands-on the approach, the more fun the students will have: the more fun, the more they will learn.
2. Parents need to get involved in their children's education. Develop avenues for parental involvement that are linked to the educational process. This may take different paths for different parents. However, when parents are encouraged to come to school, to get involved in their child's education through meaningful activities, and are given an opportunity to learn about the educational system in which their child

attends, their children realize that a commitment has been made. This is translated into better attendance, discipline, and learning.

3. Incorporate the thematic approach into the instructional process so the students develop a feeling that learning is connected, not disjointed. Through this approach, students have the opportunity to read trade books, investigate problems, research topics, and integrate their learning. They learn how to be independent in their quest for knowledge and to seek assistance in solving their problems. They are not constantly searching for the only correct answer.

4. Consider alternative classroom designs in meeting the needs of students. This includes, but is not limited to, holding classes out-of-doors or in other part of the school. Students and teachers enjoy a change of scenery when actively involved in the learning process. This can also take the form of alternative arrangements within the classroom, i.e. sitting on the floor, working in groups, or gathering around a computer as one student enters text into a word processor.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SHEET

Your School

1. How old are you?
2. What grade were you in last school year?
3. Did you like to go to school?
   a. Why or why not?
   b. What grades did you receive in school last year?
   c. How many children were in your class last year?
   d. Were all the children in the same grade or were there children from other grades in your classes?
   e. Did you change classes for different subjects or did you have the same teacher for all of the subjects?
4. Did you like your teacher(s) last school year?
   a. Why or why not?
   b. How many teachers did you have last year?
5. How would you describe your favorite teacher?
   a. What made them your favorite?
6. How would you describe your least favorite teacher?
   a. What made them your least favorite?

7. What is your favorite subject in school?

   a. Why?

   b. How does your teacher teach you that subject?

      (look for clues like hands-on activities, cooperative learning techniques, room arrangement, worksheets, etc.)

   c. Did any of your teachers use themes last year?

      1). Tell me about the themes.

      2). How long were they?

      3). How often did they use themes?

8. What is your least favorite subject?

   a. Why?

   b. How does your teacher teach you that subject?

      (look for clues like room arrangement, worksheets, quietness must prevail, etc.)

9. Of everything that took place during your school day last year, what did you like the most?

   a. Why?

10. Of everything that took place during your school day last year, what did you like the least?

    a. Why?

11. Did you tell your family about things you learned in school?

    a. Why?/Why not?

12. Do you think that your family was interest in what you did in school last year?

    a. Why?/Why not?

13. Tell me the best thing that happened to you in school last year.

14. Tell me the worst thing that happened to you in school last year.

15. Tell me the most important thing that you learned in school last year.

VSU SUMMER PROGRAM

1. Which group are you in at our school?
2. Why are you coming to the summer program?
3. Do you like to come to the summer program?
   a. Why?/Why not?
4. How many children are in your class here?
5. Do you like your teacher at the summer program?
   a. Why?/Why not?
   b. How would you describe your teacher in the summer program?
6. What do you like most about the summer program?
   a. Why?
7. What do you like least about the summer program?
   a. Why?
8. Tell me about the theme you are studying this summer.
   a. How does your teacher teach the theme?
      (look for clues mentioned above)
9. How is what you are doing at the summer program the same as what you do in your real school?
10. How is what you are doing at the summer program different from what you do in your real school?

11. Do you tell your family about what you do during the summer program?

12. Is your family interested in what you are doing at the summer program?

    a. How do you know?

13. Tell me what the best thing is that has taken place for you this summer at the summer program.

14. Tell me what the worst thing that has taken place for you this summer at the summer program.

15. Tell me the most important thing that you have learned so far this summer.

16. Would you like to take part in the summer program next year?

    a. Why?/Why not?

17. If you come back next year, what would you like to see done differently?

PARENT SURVEY

1. How many children did you have attend the program? _____

2. In which class was your child (or children)?

(Circle the appropriate area.)

a. Kindergarten/First Grade -

Ms. Hutchison, Ms. Dodd, and Ms. Hodge

b. Second/Third Grade -

Ms. Barfield, Ms. Maynard, Ms. Nussbaum-Beach, and Ms. Weidinger

c. Fourth/Seventh Grade -

Ms. Oliver, Mr. Barfield, and Mr. Reinhart

3. Did your child (or children) attend all four weeks?

a. Yes

b. No

If "no," how many weeks did your child (or children) attend? ____

4. Please give a grade to the experience each child had in the Summer Program:

A = Excellent B = Above Average

C = Average D = Below Average

E = Poor

Child's Age	Grade
_____	___
_____	___
_____	___
_____	___
_____	___

PLEASE CIRCLE THE STATEMENT WHICH BEST DESCRIBES ____ _____ SUMMER PROGRAM EXPERIENCE.

PLEASE NOTE: "School" refers to your child's public or private school. "Summer Program" refers to the VSU/PINE GROVE experience this past summer.

5. His/her attitude about attending the summer program:
   a. He/she looked forward to going to the summer program.
   b. He/she didn't want to attend the program.
6. His/her attitude towards school before attending the summer program:
   a. He/she has always enjoyed school.
   b. He/she used to enjoy school, but lately has become disinterested.
   c. He/she has always disliked school.

7. His/her attitude towards school this fall:

   a. He/she looked forward to the beginning of school.

   b. He/she was disinterested in school.

   c. He/she did not want to go to school.

8. His/her grades in school last year:

   a. Mostly "A's" and "B's."

   b. Mostly "B's" and "C's."

   c. Mostly "C's" or lower.

9. His/her grades in school so far this year compared to last year:

   a. Most grades are higher.

   b. Most grades are lower.

   c. No real change.

10. His/her feelings about ability to do school work last year:

    a. He/she was able to handle most of the school work.

    b. He/she experienced some difficulty in school work.

    c. He/she was unable to keep up with school work.

11. His/her feelings about ability to do school work this year:

    a. He/she can handle most of the school work.

    b. He/she has some difficulty in school work.

    c. He/she is unable to keep up with school work.

12. Do you feel that your child benefitted from the summer program?

    a. Yes

    b. To some extent

    c. No

13. Would you send your child to next year's summer program?

    a. Yes

    b. No

    c. Maybe

14. How did you feel about your child's experience?

    a. Definitely pleased

    b. Undecided

    c. Displeased

    If "c," please explain._____

15. Does your child attend a private or a public school?

    a. Private

    b. Public

16. Would you support a similar program during the regular school year if it were provided as an alternative with no tuition?

    a. Yes

    b. Undecided

    c. No

17. Was the way your child was taught in the Summer Program different from the way he/she is taught in school?

    a. Yes

    b. No

    If "yes," how was it different? _____

18. What suggestions do you have for improvement of the summer program?